

The Professional Drummer

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

Many drummers dream of a professional drumming career. Some make it, some don't. How can you increase your chances of getting the better gig?

Getting a recommended teacher is very important. Get a great teacher, someone technically sound who is open to new ideas and knows what's happening musically. A teacher who can relate to you and provide motivation. When that teacher takes you as far as he can, move on to a higher-level teacher. Today, reading music is a must. With music being on such a higher level than it was ten years ago, a lot of music is written out, especially in studio sessions. You should cover literature in all musical areas. Sightreading is a definite plus. Most shows and sessions have limited rehearsal time, so besides making the gig go easier, it will add to your reputation.

Practice, practice, practice. Become as proficient on your instrument as possible. Learn to play different percussion instruments

Listen to everything; not only music you like, but styles you may be unfamiliar

with. Look for certain "keys" that make one style different from another. Is the hi-hat halfway open or closed tight? Is the drummer playing rim shots or just hitting the snare drum? Become aware of all music, and be on the lookout for new ideas and techniques. Get yourself on a steady practice schedule every day. Remember, there are other drummers out there that will eat you for breakfast. Always try to progress to a higher level.

Try to get yourself into as many different playing situations as possible: jam sessions, rehearsal bands, school orchestra, fill-ins, sit-ins at clubs, etc. The more you play with other people, the better. Experience playing different styles of music with different size bands. It's a good way to tighten yourself up and develop taste, as well as learning how to communicate through your instrument with other musicians. Learn when to step on the gas and when to lay back. Should you decide to continue your musical education at college, pick the one that's best suited to your needs. It never hurts to have a basic knowledge

of theory, harmony, and keyboard technique.

New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville are the prime locations for action in the music business. If you decide to try working in one of those cities, have business cards made up with your name and telephone number. If you have enough past experience to warrant a resume, type one up and make copies. If you can afford it, type-set resumes look the most professional.

Before leaving your hometown, try to get referrals from musicians you already know. Have as many names to call as you can possibly get. When you arrive in the big city, call all the contacts you've been given or have personally accumulated. Then, get out there and meet people. Putting your cards up on bulletin boards or at recording studios shows a basic lack of awareness. Give people your card in person. And always be friendly, and armed with a smile. People will remember you more if you come with a positive attitude. Be yourself rather than trying to jive your way in.

You should show a genuine love for your instrument and for all music. Also, keep in mind that looking good is half the battle. First impressions really do matter a lot. If you look unkempt, people will assume that your appearance is your attitude's twin.

There are so many places in a big city to get your name around. Place ads in newspapers. Use the mail and telephone services to your advantage in contacting management companies, publishing houses, jingle production houses, rehearsal studios, etc. Take every available road to promote yourself. If you make mailings, follow-up with a phone call a few days later to see if they received your information, and if there is any work available. A lot of people really are too busy to talk, but don't get discouraged. There are a lot of helpful people out there, too. When you get an opportunity to talk to these people, keep in mind you're selling a product. And like a good salesman, point out the good qualities of your product and what it can do for them. Be business-like, but natural. Show that besides being a good musician, you're a great person to be with.

Be sure to always make yourself available; thus, the importance of a telephone number. If you don't have a phone, hire an answering service which will let you use their number, take incoming messages, and give messages. Some even offer their address as your mailing address. You can't afford to miss calls. When you do get messages, be absolutely certain you call the person back as soon as you can.

Again, try to place yourself in as many playing situations as possible. Actions speak louder than words, so get out there and demonstrate your abilities. Your name will get around faster than you think. And when your time comes to play, show definite confidence in your talent. Confidence without arrogance.

Always be on time for auditions and gigs, especially in studio work. Sessions cost a lot of money. If you're really good, but you're late, they might call you back one more time. But if you're late twice, you'll probably never hear from them again.

There will be times when nothing seems to work out. You'll get fed up and discouraged, and probably begin to doubt your own abilities. This is a particularly self-destructive period. Try to keep your chin up. Things will happen if you persevere. Keep practicing, keep a positive attitude, and keep getting out and meeting people. A professional drumming career can be one of the most rewarding experiences in the world. But, like anything else worth achieving, there is a price to pay. You must work for it. And once you're in, be prepared to continually work at it. Good luck.

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